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SUBJECT: LEBANON: HIZBALLAH ACKNOWLEDGES TELECOM NETWORK TO
EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR

REF: A. BEIRUT 489

1B. BEIRUT 490

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)).

SUMMARY

11. (C) Egyptian Ambassador Ahmed al-Bedawi remarked to the Charge on April 10 that Hizballah is very open about all of its operations, including its new fiber optic telecom network. Bedawi also said Hizballah member/resigned Minister of Energy and Water Mohammed Fneish told him he is concerned about what he sees as too much of an emphasis on militarization of youth in the south as opposed to education.

Worried about potential threats the Palestinian refugee camps pose to Lebanon, Bedawi emphasized that the refugees' living conditions need to be improved. He mentioned that it was unlikely parliament Speaker Nabih Berri would receive a green light from Egypt or Saudi Arabia to visit their capitals (Ref A). End summary.

HIZBALLAH OPEN ABOUT
ITS TELECOM NETWORK

12. (C) The Charge paid a courtesy call on Egyptian Ambassador Ahmed al-Bedawi on April 10. PolOff and Egyptian diplomat Yasser al-Atawi also attended the meeting. Reporting on recent conversations he has had with Hizballah officials, Bedawi remarked that Hizballah is very open about all of its operations. He relayed that one Hizballah official did not downplay recent public reports on Hizballah building a fiber optic telecom network, and asked Bedawi, "How do you think we ran a resistance in 2006?" Bedawi told the Ambassador that PM Fouad Siniora showed him a map denoting the network in Lebanon. (Note: Charge received the same map this week from March 14 leader Walid Jumblatt (Ref B). End note.)

HIZBALLAH YOUTH
NOT STUDYING ENOUGH

13. (C) Bedawi recently met with resigned Hizballah Minister of Energy and Water Mohammed Fneish, who is concerned about what he sees as too much militarization of youth in the south, and that not enough attention is devoted to education. The youth idolize assassinated Hizballah leader Imad Mugniyeh, who was uneducated but had taught himself English and Farsi, Fneish told the Egyptian.

REFUGEE CAMPS A "LOOSE CANNON"

¶ 14. (C) Bedawi expressed his concern about potential threats the Palestinian refugee camps pose to Lebanon, referring to the camps as "loose cannons." In his opinion, the longer it takes to rebuild the Nahr al-Barid camp in the north, the more the tension will increase among the refugees. He recommended that more efforts be taken to improve the refugees' living conditions. Pleading ignorance, he inquired whether the Charge had heard of Iranian influence in the camps, adding, "I would think that Iran would be trying to expand its influence in the camps."

NO NEWS YET ON MUGNIYEH'S
ASSASSINATION

¶ 15. (C) Yasser al-Atawi reported that Free Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun's television network, OTV, was running a clip from the Iranian news agency Fars that claimed the results from the Syrian investigation into Mugniyeh's assassination would be released soon. The clip suggested Saudi and Jordanian involvement, facilitated by Palestinians in Damascus, who purportedly helped track down Mugniyeh's movements. Atawi added that local journalists were discrediting the source. The Egyptian Ambassador commented that he believed either Syria or Israel was involved.

BERRI UNLIKELY TO RECEIVE
EGYPTIAN OR SAUDI INVITE

¶ 16. (C) Bedawi remarked that it was unlikely that parliament
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Speaker Nabih Berri would receive the green light from Egypt to visit Cairo, as Saudi King Abdullah and Egyptian President Mubarak, joined by Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa, had just met in Sharm el-Sheikh and likely had coordinated a position on not seeing Berri. Berri had previously asked Bedawi for advice on talking points during such a visit. Bedawi said that Berri would need something substantive in order to go to Egypt, and since he is not seen as someone who can deliver on what he talks about, a visit may not make sense. He predicted the same outcome for Saudi Arabia. Bedawi doubted that Berri will actually convene a National Dialogue. Nevertheless, Bedawi believes that "Deep inside, Berri wants a solution."

¶ 17. (C) Bedawi said that Berri explained that he made his recent trip to Damascus because Syria now holds the Arab League presidency. Berri reportedly described Lebanese Armed Forces Commander (LAF) Michel Sleiman's resignation announcement as "opening the doors to other presidential candidates." Bedawi added that both March 8 and March 14 leaders are criticizing Sleiman's decision.

MONEY DISTRIBUTED BY
CONFESION IS LEBANON'S GLUE

¶ 18. (C) "Lebanon is being held together because of foreign money," Bedawi stated, adding that Iranians are funding the Shia, and Gulf money is supporting the Sunnis. He said that Libya and Saudi Arabia are paying majority leader Saad Hariri directly, but that this money is not being well-distributed. Qatar is working directly with Aoun, he continued, and Syria is trying to fund pro-Syrian Druze figure and former minister Wi'am Wahhab, in an attempt to woo the Druze from Walid Jumblatt.

¶ 19. (C) On more than one occasion, the Egyptian Ambassador recommended that the U.S. give more support to the Siniora government. As examples, he suggested the U.S. facilitate a resolution on Shebaa Farms and provide more equipment to the

LAF. The Charge reminded Bedawi that the U.S. has been providing equipment and training to the LAF, and in particular, assisting the LAF in controlling Nahr al-Barid. He reported that the Egyptians are training both LAF and the Internal Security Force (ISF).

UNREPORTED SECURITY INCIDENTS

¶10. (C) Bedawi said he hears there are many security incidents that are not getting reported in the news. He also reported that Archbishop Elias Audi had recently told him he was worried about Shia-Sunni relations, believing that if something breaks out between those confessions, the Christians will be "wiped out."

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